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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001605

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09-15-13

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: Maldivian presidential election process kicks off; No signs of opposition to President Gayoom yet

Refs: Colombo 1493, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (U) In an announcement made late last week and reported on the website of the government-controlled newspaper "Haveeru," the Maldivian Elections Commission has begun soliciting applications from possible candidates for the 2003 presidential election. Applications will be accepted for a one-week period lasting from September 12-19. According to the announcement, Maldivian law sets out the following criteria for eligibility:

"Any man who is over 35 years old, who is sane, who is a Sunni Muslim, who is a person capable of carrying out presidential responsibilities, who has not been convicted for any crimes under Islamic Sharia law, who is not convicted of fraud, and who is not married to a foreigner, can run in the presidential election."

2. (U) The Elections Commission's announcement formally kicks off the Maldivian presidential selection process. Next steps in the process include:

-- A three-member committee of the Elections Commission will screen the applications received from possible candidates. The Speaker of the Majlis will then announce the final list of candidates.

-- In a secret ballot expected to take place later this month, the 48-member Majlis (parliament) will select one candidate from among the list.

-- The winner will then be approved (or not) in a "yes/no" national referendum, which is slated to take place in October.

-- The inauguration will take place in November.

3. (C) COMMENT: President Gayoom, who has been in office since 1978, remains the hands down favorite to win his sixth five-year term. Mission has checked with a variety of contacts in the Maldives who confirm that they have not heard of anyone planning to run against Gayoom in the Majlis vote, thus far. That said, in his last race in 1998, Gayoom faced some token opposition and there will probably be several Maldivians who throw their hats in the ring this time around. Given generally favorable economic indices and little sign of serious political dissonance, however, Gayoom's path to a sixth term appears quite smooth at this time. The DCM will be in Male from September 16-17 and will take the political temperature at that time. END COMMENT.

4. (U) Minimize considered.

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